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The Mirror of Princes and the Distorting Mirror in Shakespeare's Chronicle Plays

It is no novelty to discern a pattern in Shakespeare's chronicle plays of a "mirror for kings, reflecting the universal consequences of bad or weak rule," as Harold Jenkins reminded us well over half a century ago (Jenkins 1953: 1), tracing the observation back to the German Romantic critic and translator of Shakespeare, August Wilhelm von Schlegel, in *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur* (1808; English translation 1833: 342–3, 350–1). Since that time it has been platitudinous for one group of Shakespeare editors and critics to write of the character of Henry V as "the mirror of all Christian kings" (Shakespeare, ed. Walter 1979: xxvi) or "the ideal monarch"; while a countertendency, apparently since Hazlitt's times, has seen Henry as "a cynical hypocrite, a cold-blooded Machiavellian, a brutal butcher" (cf. Richard Levin 1984: 134–41); whereas Conal Condren (2009: 197–206) applied a knowledge of Early Modern political ideas to dismiss the "Machiavellian militarist" interpretation as unhistorical.

"The mirror of all Christian kings" has all too often been treated as a convenient label and it might be worthwhile to look back into the provenance of the term and its place in Elizabethan public life.

The notion of the **mirror** (Latin *speculum*, Italian *lo specchio*, French *le miroir*) had a widespread metaphorical application in an ancient convention of political discourse otherwise known as *de regimine principum* or alternatively *de institutione principum*, and occasionally as the *speculum principis* – the mirror of the perfect prince. The roots of the custom go back into the depths of antiquity – the history of the *speculum principis* usually starts with the epistle of Isocrates to King Nicocles (ca. 376 BC) and there are also biblical antecedents – but perhaps the practice was already timeworn and traditional before Isocrates (Bałuk-Ulewiczowa 2009: 25). It consisted of advice addressed to

a monarch on the duties of the perfect prince and the best form of government, and was an excellent opportunity for an aspiring author to compliment and win the favour of a royal patron while at the same time offering instruction tantamount to political counselling. The mirrors of the perfect prince may be counted among the illustrious ancestors of modern political advertising on the one hand, and the theory of education on the other. From Isocrates on they enjoyed a continuous presence in Western civilisation, with several peaks, during the Carolingian Renaissance, the Late Middle Ages, and the Humanist Renaissance of the 15th–16th century. By this last period the original *de regimine principum* had developed several offshoots, works of a similar parenetic nature addressed to the king's closest collaborators – his counsellors and ministers, ambassadors and courtiers in their official status as public servants – before devolving into courtesy books, manuals of advice for the politically enfranchised citizen. While we know of four works in the specifically *de regimine principum* category addressed to kings of England from Henry V to Henry VIII (Bałuk-Ulewiczowa 2009: 32–3), in *The Doctrine of the English Gentleman in the Sixteenth Century* (1929) Ruth Kelso catalogued nearly a thousand items in its class of derivatives published or read in England to 1625. We may conclude that in the reign of Elizabeth the *speculum* was the standard convention for political communication and we should not be at all surprised by the frequency of imagery associated with the **mirror, glass, image, idea** or **counterfeit** in the Shakespearean oeuvre. It should be stressed that *speculum* literature started and continued for many centuries as a reflection of the ruler or public figure and did not devolve into handbooks of advice for private individuals until very much later (cf. Shuger 1998: 22–30; Kelly 2002: 1, 4–5; Condren 2009: 197).

John Dickinson, writing on John of Salisbury, gave the following description of the virtues of the perfect prince in a synopsis of the main features of the *speculum principis*:

> The king should be chaste and avoid avarice; he should be learned in letters; he should be humble; he should banish from his realm actors and mimes, buffoons and harlots; he should seek the welfare of others and not his own; he should wholly forget the affections of flesh and blood and do only that which is demanded by the welfare and safety of his subjects; he should be both father and husband to them; he should correct their errors with the proper remedies; he should be affable of speech and generous in conferring benefits; he should temper justice with mercy; he should punish the wrongs and injuries of all, and all crimes, with even-handed equity; he has duties to the very wise and the very foolish, to little children and to the aged; his shield is a shield for the protection of the weak, and should ward off the darts of the wicked from the innocent; he must act on the counsel of wise men;

> he must protect the widow and the orphan; he must curb the malice of officials and provide for them out of the public funds, to the end that all occasion for extortion may be removed; he must restrain the soldiery from outrage; he should be learned in law and in military science; he must in all things provide for the welfare of the lower classes; he must avoid levity; he is charged with the disposal of the means of the public welfare, and is the dispenser of honor; he must not close his ear to the cries of the poor; he must raise aloft the roof-tree of the Church and extend abroad the worship of religion; he must protect the Church against sacrilege and rapine; and finally, he must ever strive so to rule that in the whole community he presides over none shall be sorrowful. (Dickinson 1926: 319–20)

The above passage may be juxtaposed with a short excerpt from Hall's chronicle, Shakespeare's source for the framework of *Henry V* and the character of the play's protagonist:

> This prince was almost the Arabicall Phenix, and emongest his predecessors a very Paragon: For that he emongest all gouernors, chiefly did remembre that a kyng ought to bee a ruler with wit, grauitie, circumspeccion, diligence and constancie, and for that cause to haue a rule to hym comitted, not for an honor, but for an onorarious charge and daily burden, and not to looke so muche on other mennes liuynges, as to consider and remembre his owne doynges and propre actes. For whiche cause, he not to muche trustyng to the readinesse of his owne witte, nor to the iudgementes of his owne waueryng will, called to his counsaill suche prudent and politique personages, the whiche should not onely help to ease his charge & pain in supportyng the burden of his realme and Empire, but also incense and instruct hym with suche good reasons and fruitefull perswasions, that he might shewe hymself a synguler mirror and manifest example of moral vertues and good qualities to his comen people and louing subiectes. (Hall 1809: 46)

A comparison of the above passage from Hall's Chronicle with Dickinson's explication of the medieval *speculum principis* brings to light an important issue. Henry V's description in the chronicle shows all the characteristic features of the *speculum* Dickinson lists and it would not be amiss to classify late medieval/early Renaissance chronicles as belonging to the broad category of the *specula*. Note that I have not called the *de regimine principum* and its derivatives a literary genre, but rather a convention in political discourse. It is not a genre because it manifested itself in a variety of forms, as poetry and as prose, in an epistle or a set of maxims or precepts; and it could be incorporated into and conveyed in a larger instrument such as a chronicle. Moreover, mirrors of the perfect prince often applied several media to communicate their message: they would be delivered in recitations at court, or they might be inscribed on elaborately illuminated vellum, like the letter of Elizabeth Habsburg, Dowager

Queen of Poland, to her first-born (Bałuk-Ulewiczowa 2009: 34). In his Introduction to probably the best-known English mirror-book, Thomas Elyot's *The Governor*, S.E. Lehmberg (Elyot, 1962: vii) notes that Hall and Holinshed may have drawn the story of Prince Hal's wrath from Elyot's Book II, Chapter VI, the earliest record of the incident. Ruth Kelso's lengthy catalogue shows that Elizabethans were familiar with the *speculum* convention; for them it was the expected and popular mode of communication for matters public and political. When they recognised it they were more likely than not to read the message straight – in other words we should not think of Shakespeare's original audiences as being inclined to interpret the character of Henry V as "a Machiavellian militarist who professes Christianity but whose deeds reveal both hypocrisy and satire."

This must certainly have applied to the original reception of the characters of the monarchs: Henry V was "the mirror of all Christian princes," while Richard II was a tyrant on account of his "vnprofitable counsailers." Shakespeare's contemporaries would not have had qualms or moral hiccups over the rejection of Falstaff, chief of the "old plaie felowes, . . . preuie Sicophantes and vngracious gard," because, according to *speculum* lore, they were the "authors and procurers of al mischifes and riot" (Hall 1809: 47) not fit for the company of the ideal monarch.

The word "mirror" or one of its synonyms such as "glass," "image," "picture," "portrait," or "idea" (in the Platonic sense), and its counterparts in other-language mirror-books often appeared on the title page of *specula*: *The mirror of majestie* (1618; Kelso No. 601), *A myrrour for English souldiers* (1595; Kelso No. 602), Sancius de Arevalo's *Speculum vitae humanae* (first published 1468; Kelso No. 787), *Le miroir politique* by De La Perriere (1567; Kelso No. 518) and its English translation, *The mirror of policie* (1598; Kelso No. 519) etc. Debora Shuger (1998: 21–2) notes the abundance of mirror titles and Arthur F. Kinney (2004: 6–8) throws in several more to the many that are to be found in Kelso's list.

The metaphor of the mirror may be understood if we look at its use particularly in the letters dedicatory to *specula* and courtesy books. The translator of *The Counsellor* (1598; Kelso No. 436), the English version of Laurentius Grimalius Goslicius' treatise *De Optimo Senatore* (1568; Kelso No. 435), rendered the final part of the dedication to the King of Poland as follows:

> Not meaning therby to enforme you (for such is your excellent wisedome as needeth not the instruction of anie), but that by reading, **your Maiestie may be delighted to behold your owne vertues,** and as a Prince of that gouerment, be glad,

> that the same is most iust and respondent to other auncient and praiseable commonweales. (emphasis added)

Many compilers of mirror-books did likewise. In the Epistle Dedicatorie addressed to the Earl of Essex at the beginning of his translation of Giovambattista Nenna's *Il Nennio* (Kelso No. 634; English version *Nennio or a Treatise of Nobility*, Kelso No. 493), William Jones wrote:

> Your L[ordship's] perfections can well witnesse, that your demerites, haue added such grace to your Nobilitie, that not only the common sort doe admire, but the court likewise and the chiefest glory thereof, doe testifie, that both these conioyned together in your L[ordship] doe make you perfectly Noble. But if your H[ighness] would **behold a truer Idea of right, & accomplished Nobility,** then this Author writeth of, **your L[ordship] need but as in a glass to view your selfe, and thereby to set downe what you see in your selfe**. (emphasis added)

We now have an insight into the full meaning of the metaphor. As Arthur Kinney (2004: 5) writes, Tudors and Stuarts could "rely on mirrors as fundamental (and trustworthy) means of self-knowledge, following the dictate, as old as Socrates, to know thyself." But the mirror was also an instrument for the paying of compliments, flattery, or, in the extreme case, sycophancy and self-aggrandisement. It is in this light, I believe, that we should read the symbolic meaning of the mirror-smashing episode in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, which is the immediate sequel to the deposition (4.1.264–99).

Richard summons all present to witness his personal act of abdication (l. 203), and then in the words of lines 204–14 and the accompanying gestures performs a ritual to abjure his monarchical status. He disowns his crown, puts away his sceptre, with his tears washes off the holy oil with which he was anointed at his coronation, and revokes all the feudal oaths of loyalty made to him. He has gone through a ceremony of his own making which has all the features of a legal transaction, a formula. Yet when asked whether he is "contented to resign the crown" (abdicating of his own free will – l. 200), and asked to read the list of "grievous crimes" he is accused of – he refuses to comply.

The King's Two Bodies, Ernst Kantorowicz's seminal interpretation of the play, describes the dual concept of the person of the monarch as the individual who is simultaneously and indelibly the human receptacle of "the king's body politic, god-like or angel-like" (Kantorowicz 1957: 27). To indulge in an anachronistic explanation – when forced to abdicate Richard plunges into a state of schizophrenia: it is the public Richard in his body, the crowned and anointed head of the state that repudiates his irrevocable office as king, but the private

individual refuses to concur. After the legal rite of abdication he asks for a mirror – and Elizabethan audiences would have recognised it as the king's mirror, in which Richard intends to **read** (l. 276) the offices and duties the monarch is bounden to perform. In the words of Kantorowicz, "the mirror scene is the climax of that tragedy of dual personality" (39). The discrowned private individual looks into it, in the human manner and hoping against all the odds, maybe still to see the royal virtues reflected in the face in the mirror. Yet disappointment must follow inevitably on the legal ritual which he has just performed. No royal virtues appear in the *speculum principis*, and the breaking of the mirror of the perfect prince is the final element in the ritually performed act of abdication.

Two words out of Shakespeare's lexical resources for the deposition scene deserve scrutiny in the *speculum principis* context. They are "face" and "shadow" in the exchange between Richard and Bolingbroke following the breaking of the mirror:

> Richard
> For there it is, crack'd in a hundred shivers.
> Mark, silent king, the moral of this sport –
> How soon my sorrow hath destroy'd my face.
>
> Bolingbroke
> The shadow of your sorrow hath destroyed
> The shadow of your face. (4.1.289–93)

"Face" is fairly easy to understand in the context of the *speculum principis*. Allegorically, the image, counterfeit, portrait or face appearing in the mirror of kings is the sum total of the king's royal virtues, his personal qualifications for the exercise of authority and power. Not only the physical mirror, but Richard's monarchical "face" is "crack'd in a hundred shivers." "Shadow" is interpreted by Peter Ure (1964: 141) to mean something that is unreal. But "shadow" may also mean "an imperfect imitation or copy," "a hint, image, or faint semblance," "a remnant or vestige," "a reflection" (especially in a mirror which is not "true" and produces an image distorted by the chromatic aberration effect), and finally "a ghost or spectre." Shakespeare (and his original audiences) might have had any or all of these meanings in mind, but those familiar with philosophical concepts might have thought of the Platonic Idea and ideal (cf. Hattaway 2009: 36) especially in the context of Richard's reply, that his grief is internal, in his soul, while the "external manners of lament / Are merely *shadows* of the unseen grief / That swells with silence in the tortur'd soul. There lies the

substance" (l. 295–9). The compilers of *specula* of the ideal king or counsellor also invoked Plato – sometimes to dissociate themselves from the Platonic theory of forms and its abstract, perfect Idea. Their aim was to draw up a handbook of practical, down-to-earth advice. This is how the translation of Goslicius formulated it:

> My intent is not to frame an Idæa, or Councellor imagined, such a one as cannot be seene but onely in conceipt, or that the heauens have scantly any so perfect, or the earth doth not containe any **shadowe** of such a man (as did Plato in his commonweale and Cicero in his Orator) but our speech shall tende to thinges possible not exceeding the ordinarie vse of men. (1598: 2)

One of the meanings of O. E. *sorg* (< "sorrow"), apart from "grief," "regret," was "care," a word that comes in the next lines. If we interpret Bolingbroke's retort in this way, then what he is saying is bitterly ironic. He is taunting Richard by telling him that his kingship has been far from perfect, although he imagined himself to be Plato's ideal ("the shadow of your face"), and that his imperfect kingship has been shattered by the far from perfect way in which he countenanced and carried out his royal duties ("the shadow of your sorrow"). For in the real world there is no such thing as a perfect prince, but the distance which separates a real king from the Platonic ideal is differentiated by the way in which the particular individual carries out his duties.

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Mirror motifs, imagery and terminology are pervasive throughout the cycle of chronicle plays from *Richard II* to *Richard III*; they carry the political message and they also amplify the dramatic effects although, like the glass-shattering episode in *Richard II*, not all of them may be traced to Hall and Holinshed. Kelso's catalogue provides an indication of Shakespeare's sources: its nigh on a thousand items suggest the popularity, and hence ubiquity, of *speculum* language. There is so much of it in the chronicle plays that here I shall limit myself to enumerating just a few instances.

First the concept of "virtue" – the cornerstone of all mirrors of the perfect prince, counsellor, or courtier. Modern readers may be disturbed by the frequency of this word and its derivative, "virtuous," in plays on treason and treachery, civil war and carnage. In Shakespeare's English "virtue" had two distinct senses which came together in the mirror literature. The word is derived from Latin *virtus* which carried the same two meanings: first of the moral virtues, the good qualities in an individual's character (the cardinal virtues prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance, and their ancillary virtues). But

"virtue" also meant "characteristic feature, aptitude, skill, capability and qualification." Significantly, it was in this second sense that Machiavelli employed the term "virtù" to describe the capacity for political action in his *Prince* – a set of features far from what we may perceive as moral goodness. When Shakespeare puts the words "virtue" or "virtuous" into the mouths of his royal and noble characters he has the first sense in the forefront of his mind, nonetheless the sinister meaning may always be lurking in the shadows. He opens *1 Henry VI* with the word in Gloucester's epitaph on Henry V, who deserved to command on account of his "virtue" (1.1.9). It recurs with reference to Queen Margaret (5.2.43 and 5.5.3). In *2 Henry VI* York describes Humphrey, the "good" Duke of Gloucester, as a "virtuous prince" and "shepherd of the flock" (2.2.72–3), the latter being a standard phrase in *speculum* lore, with classical and biblical roots. "Virtue" re-appears in Act 3 in the sense of moral goodness, when Gloucester contrasts it with the "ambition" choking it (3.1.143). In *3 Henry VI* the contemplative (and therefore inactive, weak) King defends his pacific nature and behaviour by pledging that he will leave his son his "virtuous deeds" (2.2.49) – here in the very opposite sense of the military "virtues" for which his father was praised in *1 Henry VI*. "Virtuous" meaning "skilled in the government of the state, having the requisite qualifications for political activity" comes in *Richard III*, in the conversation of three citizens commenting on the evils of a minority reign. One remarks that the situation on the death of Edward IV, who has left his infant son and successor at the mercy of Richard of Gloucester, is far worse than when Henry V died leaving the infant Henry VI under the care of his "virtuous uncles" and their "politic grave counsel" (another *speculum* cliché – 2.3.20–1). A knowledge of the power struggles the three uncles engaged in precludes the meaning of "moral goodness" here. In Act 3 the word "virtue" is put into the deceitful mouth of Richard hailing the young Prince Edward, soon to be his victim, with the fraudulent apostrophe "Sweet Prince, the untainted virtue of your years / Hath not yet div'd into the world's deceit" (3.1.7–8). In this scene, which demonstrates the young prince's royal potential and therefore the profound atrocity of his impending murder, one of the murderer's asides (l. 82–3) incorporates the opposite of "virtue," "Vice," next to its synonym, "Iniquity," after being partly overheard with another aside on the forthcoming event: "So wise so young, they say, do never live long" (l. 79), perhaps an allusion to the classical maxim "those whom the gods love die young." Richard is compelled to explain what he has just said and comes up with another, pseudo-classical adage: "without characters fame lives long," perhaps a conflation of *gloria virtuti resonat* (fame is an echo of virtue) and *vita sine litteris mors est, et hominis vivi sepultura* (life without letters

(*viz.* learning) is a living death – Seneca the Younger, Letter 82). Note that if we read "characters" as meaning "distinctive features of a human personality" Richard's quibble acquires yet another, sinister sense: Edward's fame will be perpetuated untainted because he will never have had the opportunity to grow to adulthood and spoil it with vices – unlike his murderous uncle. Thus Richard "moralises two meanings in one word," demonstrating a fiendish ability to juggle with the classical adages in which the traditional *specula* abounded. Finally the word "virtue" is corrupted by the mouth of a sycophant. The Machiavellian tyrant Richard is called a "virtuous Prince" (3.7.77), standing between two bishops who are "Two props for a Christian Prince" (3.7.95) in a perverted near-echo of the title of Erasmus' renowned mirror-book, the *Institutio Principis Christiani*.

The frequency and contextual meaning in the eight plays of "mirror," "glass," and "image," the most basic terms of the *specula*, is indicative of a specific, intentional practice. In *1 Henry VI* Salisbury addresses the wounded Talbot as the "mirror of all martial men" (1.4.74), and in the following line gives a grisly description of the wounds. In *2 Henry VI* the mirror is invoked in an exchange of dishonourable epithets between representatives of the feuding parties. Clifford calls the Yorkists "a brood of traitors," and is promptly answered by the Duke of York, who tells him to "look in a glass and call his image so" before declaring his kingship, that is his right to the throne, and calling those who contest his claim "false-hearted traitors" (5.1.142–3). The metaphor of the mirror serves the double purpose of identification and self-identification. In *3 Henry VI*, again in a dispute, between Warwick and Oxford defending the dynastic rights of the Lancastrians, the word "mirror" is used in the sense of "example" and occurs in connection with one of the chief virtues prescribed in the *specula*. The usurper Henry IV is eulogised as a wise prince "whose wisdom was a mirror to the wisest" (3.3.83).

In *Richard III* the royal anti-hero who has vowed to "set the murderous Machiavel to school" sports with *speculum* concepts and terminology in his soliloquies and asides to voice the sadistic disclosures of a tyrant. Already in the Winter of Our Discontent speech he displays his familiarity with, and contempt for the derivative courtesy-books when he confides that he is not "made to court an amorous looking-glass" (1.1.15), although that is precisely what he will do in the very next scene. At the end of his speedy courtship of the woman whose husband and father-in-law he admits to having killed, in his second soliloquy, he twice employs the metaphor of the looking-glass, again with the derision he ascribed to it in his opening address; this time, however, the deformed tyrant-*in-spe*, surprised to have won the lady so quickly, decides to get

a mirror to see what it is about his "shadow" that has made her take him for "a marvellous proper man" (1.2.258–60, 267–8). Richard of Gloucester scorns the traditional mirror-books, but identifies with their Machiavellian branch, and in this way still conforms to a serious approach to the *specula*. Shakespeare indulges in anachronism in his references to Machiavelli; historically *Il Principe* was not written until over two decades after Richard III's death. Nevertheless, the term "Machiavel" made its way into the English language and political culture well in advance of the translated text, which circulated in manuscript copies until 1640, when it was finally published "when censorship broke down prior to the initiation of civil hostilities" (Roe 2007: 359, quoted in Petrina 2009: 48). Although *Il Principe* was radically misread in the 16th century "in the *specula principum* tradition, as if it were a meta-temporal setting down of rules, a moral and ideological guide for the prince" (Petrina 2009: 7), here we are interested in its actual reception. Piotr Mróz (1992: 10–108) sees Machiavelli's *Il Principe* and Erasmus' *Institutio Principis Christiani* as each other's opposites marking out two divergent paths in the *de regimine principis* tradition. It would be correct to say that notwithstanding flawed reception, Shakespeare and his original audiences perceived *Il Principe* as belonging to the class of mirror-books, which would make Shakespeare's Richard of Gloucester a legitimate reader-recipient of the *specula*.

The metaphor of the image and the mirror, this time as an epithet for human beings who inherit (or do not inherit) their ancestors' virtues, recurs in yet another context of death and grieving women. Queen Elizabeth Woodville is met by her mother-in-law the Duchess of York, and they grieve for Edward IV and his brother, the Duke of Clarence, the "two mirrors of princely semblance" to their executed father, the Duke of York – two mirrors now "crack'd in pieces by malignant death." The Duchess describes her surviving son, the future Richard III, as a "false glass" (2.2.50–4).

The numerous father – son relationships in the chronicle plays deserve re-examination in the light of the *speculum* tradition. One of the popular and ancient forms of the parenetic mirror-books was that of a set of instructions or advice given to a son by his father or tutor. In Elizabethan and Jacobean times a custom developed for the most prominent courtiers and public figures like William Cecil, Robert Cecil, Sir Walter Raleigh, and Sir Henry Sidney to write books of advice for their sons. It would not be surprising if Shakespeare's original audiences interpreted the diverse father – son relationships in the history plays against a background of the mirror-books, especially as these scenes generally treat of the political and/or military virtues. There are two instances in *Richard II* in which the profligate King is admonished by senior relatives, his

uncles John of Gaunt and Edmund, Duke of York (Act 2 Scene 1), who speak on behalf of the honour of the family and dynasty, as if standing in for their deceased brother, Richard's father. There are two more father – son relationships in this play: that of Henry Bolingbroke and his "unthrifty son" Hal (5.2.1–24); and that of the Duke of York, estranged from his son Aumerle by the discovery of the latter's treason (5.2.37–71). In *1 Henry IV* the relationship between Bolingbroke, now King, and his madcap son deteriorates further against the background of the envy evoked in the King by the unfavourable comparison of his own son with Hotspur, the Duke of Northumberland's son (1.1.77–94). Prince Hal's development appears to be in breach of the parenetic convention whereby a moral education is prescribed for the noble boy who is to grow up to be the wise, just, courageous and temperate ruler. On this point Shakespeare was following his sources the chroniclers, who gave a detailed account of Henry V's wayward youth. However, the sweeping transformation of the Prince's character in *Henry V* is anticipated in *speculum* terms and with the use of solar imagery in his soliloquy (*1 Henry IV* 1.2.190–212), which acts as a correction, adjusting Hal's deflection from the *speculum* pattern and bringing him back onto the true course for kingship. Meanwhile Hotspur, the envied virtuous son, declines into ignoble rebellion. Shakespeare indulged his *licentia dramatica* making Hal and Hotspur the same age (in reality Hotspur was considerably older than Hal), perhaps also with the re-alignment of this divergence from the standard parenetic pattern of the mirror-books in mind. Hotspur's aberration from the education laid down in parenetic works is expounded in the Duke of Worcester's comment: "He apprehends a world of figures here,/ But not the form of what he should attend" (1.3.207–8). "Figure" and "form" are polysemous expressions in mirror-books. They may refer to the art of rhetoric, but also to several other topics regularly discussed in works on the education of the prince or nobleman (various sports, martial arts, dancing etc.).

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So far I have discussed situations where Shakespeare introduced the mirror-book tradition in a straightforward, matter-of-fact way, even when he was displaying abuses of the prescribed patterns of behaviour, as in the censures of Richard II's tyranny and even in Richard III's Machiavellianism to gloat over his sadistic tyranny. But there are several instances in the plays with deliberate reference made to the *speculum principis* tradition in a corrupt or degenerate mode which I shall call Shakespeare's distorting mirror or fairground mirror. His reason for doing so was to produce a satirical effect.

If we are to judge by the sheer number of publications in Kelso's catalogue, the vogue for mirror literature must have started pretty soon after the establishment of the printing shops (if not earlier: see Witalisz 2011: 97–183) and continued well into the 17th century, developing into a readership phenomenon on a mass scale. However, the proliferation and growing accessibility of printed books produced the effect of a logical inconsistency, a non-sequitur, a dud cheque. Originally, and for many centuries of their existence, mirror-books, particularly of the pristine *de regimine principis* type, containing instructions for the prince and his offspring, and later for the most prominent citizens in the state, were addressed to and reached only such recipients. They were designed strictly for an elite. But when the printing presses made books plentiful, mirror-books, which still presented parenetic material for the privileged estate, became available to anyone who could afford them. Their title pages continued to reproduce elaborate incentives to potential customers, describing the amazing social and personal benefits which would accrue to all who invested in a copy. They claimed to be "very necessary and profitable for all sorts of people" (Kelso No. 354); "necessary for age to move diligence, profitable for youth to shun wantonnesse: and bringing to both at last desired happinesse" (Kelso No. 255); "not onely profitable, but verie necessarie for all those that be admitted to the administration of a well-gouerned Common-weale" (Kelso No. 436); or "for the benefit of all those that please to read and understand the works and worth of a worthy writer" (Kelso No. 466). These advertisements were making promises that the products on offer could not keep: it was not an age when the mere reading of mirror-books could turn an individual from the inferior classes into a "secretarie" or a "magistrate." Yet judging by the quantity of publications they must have been keenly sought after by swarms of social climbers. By the 1590s Shakespeare had a select vantage-point to observe the antics of such aspirers and immortalised them in characters like Osric in *Hamlet*, but also in many of the (wholly or partly) comic interludes in his chronicle plays. In his fairground mirror reflections Shakespeare satirised not so much the *specula* publications themselves, but rather their mass-culture consumers, no matter whether cunning or just gullible, but always politically disenfranchised, the clowns of his tragedies, chronicles and even comedies, aping their privileged superiors and endeavouring to "speak by the card."

The first such episode comes in the garden scene of *Richard II*. As in the gravedigger scene of *Hamlet*, the opposite extremities of society are represented on the stage, with the plebeian clowns (in the original sense of the word – individuals with no political rights; cf. Hunt 1998: 301–3) not knowing they are being observed by the elite. The Queen anticipates with indignation that

the common sort will speak of matters of state – matters which are beyond them. The gardeners' talk is a mixture of instructions for the tending and pruning of "dangling apricocks" interspersed with comments on the condition of the commonwealth:

> Go thou, and like an executioner
> Cut off the heads of too fast growing sprays,
> That look too lofty in our commonwealth:
> All must be even in our government. (3.4.33–5)

Peter Ure (1964: 119) aptly relates these lines to the classical story of Tarquin's message to his son Sextus to cut off the flower heads (i.e. destroy the most eminent) of the Gabii (Ovid, *Fasti* II. 701–10) and the Greek analogy in Herodotus (V. 92) of the tyrant Thrasybulus sending a similar message to Periander. The two stories are Renaissance commonplaces and appear in many of the political *specula*. Here is the version from the English translation of Goslicius:

> [marginal gloss: The art of Tyrantes] Tyrantes were wonte to vse certaine sleightes, in arming themselues against the liberty of people. First by remouing all good and wise men . . . Such counsel Periander gaue vnto Thrasibulus, perswading him to cut of the highest spikes of corne, meaning he should put the most noble Athenians to death. The like subtiltie was followed by Sextus Tarquinius the sonne of Lucius. He being suborned by his father, pretending to be banished, fled fraudulently vnto the Gabii, where hauing so much acquaintance and friendship as he thought suffized, sent secretly vnto his father to knowe what his pleasure was should be done, who leading the messenger into the garden, there walked, and in his presence with his staffe strake of the heads of all the Dazies, which being reported to his sonne, he put the chiefe noble men of Gabia to death, by force and iniustice vsurping the commonweal and liberty. (1598: 73–4)

In the mirror-books the garden is often used as a metaphor for the commonwealth. Here, in a world of carnivalesque misrule (term adopted from Hunt 1998: 301), the pattern has been inverted: for the simple gardeners the commonwealth serves as a handy metaphor for what is going on in their own domain. To her greater distress, the Queen hears from the plebs that her husband is a tyrant, just like the ones described and admonished by the mirror-books, which have been instructing even the lowest sort in the arcana of policy.

In *2 Henry VI* Jack Cade's rebellion is another sinister yet comic instance of the distorting mirror. The rebels, especially Cade, speak a perversion of the language to be found in the *specula*, and play a charade parodying court ritual, particularly what they imagine to be lofty genealogical accounts of royal

ancestry (Act 4, Scene 2; cf. Hunt 1998: 302–5). The episode is made comic by Cade's companions interrupting his mock genealogical pronouncements with punning ribaldry on Cade's "true" ancestry. The incongruity of this parody of court manners as recorded in the mirror-books, sandwiched between lewd asides representing plebeian parlance, produces a comic effect which has a more serious aspect: the social extremes are put on the stage together, showing the tensions which keen observers like Shakespeare must have discerned in their own times and imagined in an earlier age with a mixture of amusement and apprehension, curiosity and repugnance, sympathy and censure. Cade announces the "putting down of kings and princes" (l. 34) yet pledges he shall be king (l. 67). Significantly, too, he promises to kill all the lawyers (l. 74). In revolutionary repudiation of the education recommended by the parenetic mirror-books, he condemns the Clerk of Chartham to death for being "so well brought up" that he can write his name (l. 99–104). In Act 4 Scene 7 the dispraise of education is reinforced in the ridiculing of Lord Say and the "death sentence" passed on him. While the Jack Cade sub-plot is patently of lesser import in the play than the actions of the royal and aristocratic protagonists, it is obvious Shakespeare inserted it for comic relief, using Hall's chronicle for historical reference. However, apart from the remark that Cade was "not onely suborned by techers, but also enforced by privye scholemasters" there is nothing in Hall's account to tell us anything about Cade's attitude to education, and certainly nothing at all that could be described as comic. Perhaps these few words in Hall on Cade's "techers and privye scholemasters" prompted Shakespeare to embellish the peasant sub-plot with a parody of the *specula principum*.

The ultimate tableau of a fairground, or perhaps tavern, distorting mirror of princes in the chronicle plays comes in Act 2, Scene 4 of *1 Henry IV* and is embodied in the Falstaff – Prince Hal relationship, a parody of the father – son or tutor – disciple relationship of the parenetic *specula*. Richard McGuire (1967: 47–52) labels this episode "the play-within-the-play" of *1 Henry IV*, but is puzzled as to why it should be a parody. At the beginning of the scene Hal makes a declaration: his tavern friends are convinced that although he is only the Prince of Wales, yet he is the "king of courtesy" (l. 10). What follows is a parody of the courtesy books, or more specifically of the *de institutione regii pueri* strain of mirror-books, with Falstaff and Hal playing a farcical variation of the king – heir apparent relationship of the *specula*. But there is a more serious undertone prefiguring Hal's forthcoming repudiation of his tutor-in-decadence, the assumption of his "true face," his reconciliation with his royal father, and – most importantly – an explanation and defence of his conduct in the light of what is prescribed by the books of conduct for

the heir to the throne. Significantly, the Prince will not consent to everyday tavern paraphernalia substituting for the insignia of monarchical authority – just as the Queen in the garden scene of *Richard II* was appalled to hear talk of the commonweal in the same breath as of the binding of apricocks. Falstaff setting out to play the monarch and judge Hal on his doings mentions King Cambyses, a familiar *specula* story, thereby inadvertently sealing his own imminent fate. Here is the story from the English version of Goslicius, in which it comes in a passage on justice and judges, especially corrupt judges:

> Iudges ought to be incorrupt and chast, seuere, sharpe witted, good conceiuers of all things, graue, constant & inexorable. Cambises king of Persia, caused the skin of one vniust iudge to be fleade from his bodie, and hanged vp in the place of iudgement, to the end that therby all other iudges might be warned to be iust and vpright. (1598: 106)

In the event Hal stopped short of actually flaying Falstaff. In Herodotus V Cambyses had the corrupt judge flayed and the judge's bench upholstered with his skin, on which his son was made to sit and hear cases.

The scene continues with Falstaff as the King inquiring in good *speculum* style into the company Hal keeps (l. 394), and eventually, after a flourish of bombast, going on to eulogise one of Hal's associates, "a virtuous man" – himself. They swap roles and Hal, now as his father the King, delivers the quintessential antithesis of a *speculum* eulogy of Falstaff, and his name-calling spree marks the climax of the parody of the mirror-books:

> Thou art violently carried away from grace, there is a devil haunts thee in the likeness of an old fat man, a tun of man is thy companion. Why dost thou converse with that trunk of humours, that bolting-hutch of beastliness, that swollen parcel of dropsies, that huge bombard of sack, that stuffed cloakbag of guts, that roasted Manningtree ox with the pudding in his belly, that reverend vice, that grey iniquity, that father ruffian, that vanity in years? Wherein is he good, but to taste sack and drink it? Wherein neat and cleanly but to carve a capon and eat it? Wherein cunning but in craft? Wherein crafty but in villainy? Wherein villainous, but in all things? Wherein worthy but in nothing? . . . That villainous abominable misleader of youth, Falstaff, that old white-bearded Satan. (l. 440–57)

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The mirror-book convention is prevalent throughout the eight Shakespeare chronicle plays I have considered. Although I started with *Henry V*, juxtaposing its source in Hall's chronicle with a brief summary of the medieval *speculum regis*, I concentrated on the remaining plays, since for many critics from

Schlegel on the presence of a "mirror for kings, reflecting the universal consequences of bad or weak rule" in that play has been axiomatic. But in an attempt to explain why dissenters (allegedly since Hazlitt) have not been convinced by that generalised claim I examined the other seven plays against a broad spectrum of the diverse types of mirror-books as they had evolved and were being read in Shakespeare's times. The social background to the readership of the *specula*, particularly in the ancient *de regimine principum* convention, showed that Shakespeare's response to them and his use of *speculum* motifs could well have been ambivalent. On the one hand the mirror-books, particularly their imagery, presented a standard instrument for political discourse, and would have been hard to avoid completely in the histrionic conveyance of such matters. But on the other hand by the 1590s the social backdrop to their reception invited an ironic or overtly satirical response which I have labelled "the distorting mirror." The two perspectives together suggest this is a research field as yet uncharted in a systematic way which may yield interesting new interpretive results.

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